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By- Crosby, Harry H.
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After a brief discussion of the deficiencies of both prescriptive and descriptive rhetoric, the author presents a generative rhetoric as a workable technique for teaching composition. An outline is given of a generative "macro-rhetoric" which deals with the large task of how to organize and develop a statement or idea. Types of sentences, four categories of generative sentences, and the manner in which each category of generative sentence may be developed are considered. The article is concluded with a discussion of the value of using "macro-rhetoric" to teach composition. (BN)

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A Rhetorical Imperative

by Harry H. Crosby, 1967
Boston University

In recent months Marshall McLuhan has called our attention to the energy which is generated when one technology or communication medium, or intellectual discipline hybridizes or cross-pollinates with another. This phenomenon is demonstrated to the teachers of freshman English now that the new linguists are contributing so much to the study of rhetoric. Among their contributions, the new grammarians have provided labels for the various approaches currently in vogue among textbooks and teachers of rhetoric. Applying the terms provided by the linguists, rhetoricians perceive that we have among us "prescriptive rhetoricians" who, in the manner of Strunk and White and Sheridan Baker, advise students, for instance, "DON'T use passive voice" and "DO be brief." This group is lately joined by classical, medieval, and renaissance rhetoricians such as Dudley Bailey, Edward J. Corbett, Ryunda and Schwartz, Donald Lemen Clarke, Duhamel and Hughes, Walter J. Ong, and Father Daniel Fogarty, whose valuable publications reacquaint us with didactics of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, Acquinas, St. Augustine, Blair, Campbell, and Whately. In their pronouncement of principles and rules, these rhetoricians resemble the prescriptivist grammarian.

In contrast to this group, and resembling the "descriptive linguists" we have among us a school of "descriptive rhetoricians." Kenneth Burke analyzes the style of Machiavelli; Charles Beaumont describes the writing of Jonathan Swift; John Holloway, of Matthew Arnold; and Thomas O. Sloan, of John Donne. This descriptive approach is implicit in the wide-spread use of anthologies in programs of Freshman English. The essence of the approach is "This is how E.B. White did it." For White, you may substitute Thoreau, Thomas Macauley, E.M. Forster, T.S. Eliot, or whomever your current anthology anthologizes. The overt message is

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"This is how E.B. White did it" and the implication is that the student should "Go and do thou likewise."

It is the use of rules and descriptions that bugs both the grammarian and the rhetorician, whether they be prescriptive or descriptive. At one time or another, almost any student of writing meets a situation in which the rules of Strunk and White are just plain bad advice. For instance, in a scientific or learned paper, active voice often forces a student into an artifice of personification. About passive voice, Bergen Evans has perceptively written, "The English passive is a powerful verb form, . . . often the mark of an educated writer." He concludes that advice against using passive voice "should not be taken too seriously."

About the simplistic rule that good writing must be "brief," a student also soon has doubts. When he gets a paper back from his composition teacher, he sees, in red ink, "Cite illustrations," or "details." He is told, "This sentence needs development" or "expanding," and he responds "How can I be brief when you want me to add more information?" He looks about him and sees that Herman Melville, William Faulkner, E.M. Forster, Alfred North Whitehead, and a multitude of other successful writers certainly do not write in the brief style. He notes that many of the models in his anthology come from The New Yorker, whose writers have made careers out of telling us more about Texas millionaires, navel oranges, and death "In Cold Blood" than we could possibly ever want to know. When a student finds that almost all of the other rules of the prescriptive rhetorician are violated by respected writers, a credibility gap yawns and the student despairs about applying prescriptive rules to his own writing.

The descriptive approach has virtues. Students can become sensitized to useful sentence patterns; students can be helped to appreciate precision and rhythms. Rhetorical devices can be identified and described, and a student can, with profit, use them. But the disadvantages to this descriptive approach is that the student needs to know <u>when</u> he should use the various devices which he has learned to recognize and describe. As part of the descriptive approach, many teachers ask their students to imitate skilled writers, but this often results in stilted writing. We must agree with Buffon that style is the man. No matter how much the revered Mr. Franklin learned from imitating Addison and Steele, writing from described models has limitations.

The limitations of prescriptive and descriptive rhetoric are the more obvious when we are confronted with the New Breed student who has the annoying habit of asking "Why?" and "When?" I have been sympathetic with the discomfiture of teachers when they are asked why they prescribe a certain technique. One, when asked to defend paragraphs which have a balance between generalizations and specifics, commented that such writing is "more interesting," like "the music of a harp which has long and short strings." Another, when asked to defend sentences which have a proliferation of subordinate clauses and long modifiers responded, "I guess I must admit that I like writing which is textured." These answers, obviously subjective and aesthetic, do not satisfy the professional rhetorician who demands a scientific analysis; they do not satisfy the no-nonsense, clear-eyed students who says "<u>I do not agree</u>."

A fault of prescriptive grammar and prescriptive rhetoric is that too often they give bad advice; a fault of descriptive grammar and

rhetoric is that, too often, they cannot tell a student what he must do. These deficiencies explain the need for a generative study. Like the generative linguists, the generative rhetorician must try to tell the writer what forms he can and should use. When I speak of generative rhetoric, I am thinking particularly of the contributions of Francis Christensen, Wayne Booth, Paul C. Rodgers, and A.L. Becker, who have indicated appropriate and desirable forms which can be used under certain circumstances. I would like to point out, however, that these generative rhetoricians might be called "micro-rhetoricians," that is, they are concerned with the more minute structures of written composition, that is, sentences and diction. Although they have turned their attention to the paragraph, they have de-emphasized what has been called "macro-rhetoric." The micro-rhetoricians have not yet had enough to say about the larger tasks of rhetoric, how to organize and how to develop. It is to this task that I turn I am attempting to outline a generative macro-rhetoric.

Before I proceed I must point out the essential characteristic of a truly generative rhetoric. In short, it must be instructive. It must say to the student, "When you confront this situation, this is what you ought to do."

For its basis, the macro-rhetoric starts with the question: how does the need arise for an extended communication? The answer lies in the fact that sentences are essentially of two admittedly overlapping classes. If I were to say that "This manuscript has twelve pages," I would be uttering a statement which fulfills the traditional definition of a sentence, a "group of words which contains a complete thought." The thought is indeed complete; I call it a "definitive sentence." Once told that a manuscript has twelve pages, we need to know nothing

more if we are to understand the full impact of the sentence.

On the other hand, if I were to assert that "This manuscript has a tragic history," my assertion is not complete at all. Because it does not contain a complete thought it perhaps should not be called a sentence. In order to complete the thought, I must add more information. Take another sentence; "That girl deserves her shady reputation." In this case, my responsibility becomes almost a legal obligation. This obligation sets up a need for development; if the sentence is sufficiently complex, it also sets up the need for organization. These sentences are generative; rather than being definitive and complete, they "generate" need for further communication. Such a sentence is the basis for all essays, articles, themes and all non-fiction.

As a teacher of freshman composition I have long felt that the hardest lesson for a beginner is that unsupported assertion is not communication. I have used many gallons of red ink and many ergs of energy demanding that students develop their generalizations and supply necessary details. Many other rhetoricians have commented on the same problem. When James McCrimmon and S.I. Hayakawa speak of "dead level abstraction," when Francis Christensen condemns "lack of texture," and when Rudolph Flesch issues the command, "Be specific!" they are all referring to this problem. They are talking about generative sentences which have failed to generate.

With this understanding, students know what I am talking about and know what they must do when alongside their vague, unsupported assertions, I put the remark, "This sentence generates a responsibility which you fail to fulfill." I usually shorten the remark to "Proof?" or "Details," but I feel that an appreciation of the obligation hastens the time when

they customarily support and explain their observations and classifications, generalizations, judgments, and statements of causal relationship.

Students can become aware of generative sentences by being confronted with them and asked what response is expected. The definitive sentence, like "This manuscript has twelve page" yields the response, "Oh," or "Thanks for telling me." The generative sentence, on the other hand, generates questions, and we can anticipate what they are. If we are to say, for instance, "Winston Churchill's success began with an early, calamitous failure," we can predict that our listener will respond, "It did? Success in what? What was the mistake?" If we are to say "There is a way to end war," our listener very likely will respond, "You really think so? How? When a student perceives that such sentences, which are not terminal or definitive, characteristically start a dialogue, he is on the way to understanding generative rhetoric.

A generative sentence is usually one of four categories, and a rudimentary understanding of these categories will give a great deal of understanding about the extended communication which must follow them. The definitive sentence is usually only an observation. It hardly requires a thought. It is often called a fact. It usually can be checked empirically. It usually requires little or no development. In contrast, let us look at some more germinal sentences, the classification, generalization, judgment and causal relation.

Suppose we say that "Salt is a compound." This sentence is a classification. Under most circumstances, a classification is generative; the person who uttered it must assume the obligation of filling out its total meaning. It is characteristic of the classification that

it raises two questions or issues: (1) What is the nature of the class? (2) How does the specific fit the class? If a writer is aware that he has uttered a classification, he can learn easily what he must do because he has expressed it.

A second class of generative statement is the generalization. The properly sensitized writer, once he utters a generalization, finds himself confronted by two issues. (1) What is the meaning of the generalization? (2) How does my specific fit the qualities of the generalization? For demonstration, take the sentence, "Americans are materialistic." It is obvious that the issues are, "What do you mean by the term materialistic? In what way do Americans fit the term?" The dialogue has begun, and the writer knows what to write. He has recognized his obligation.

A third type of generative sentence is the judgment. Many judgments are controversial, and students should be encouraged to recognize this fact. Although most of us believe Elizabeth Taylor is beautiful, some have called her "disgusting." After all, she has been involved in a scandal or two. Although most of us think the Grand Canyon is magnificent, some think it useless. After all, you can't grow a single ear of corn in it. The student must become aware that almost inevitably when he makes such a judgment, he must answer two questions: (1) What is your criterion for judgment? (2) How does your specific fit the criterion? And once again, we see the basis for both organization and development.

The final class of generative sentence is the statement of causal relationship, the assertion that "A caused B." The issues raised by this pronouncement have best been outlined by John Stuart Mills: (1)

Did B happen every time A happened? (2) When A was not present, did B happen? (3) Did B happen when other factors besides A were present? (4) Is there some rational explanation for the relationship?

Almost with no exception, when a paper explains or defends a thesis which is a classification, generalization, judgment, or causal relationship, the organization can be predicted. When I discuss these natural dynamics of a generative sentence I refer to its "predictable organization." Although the order may be changed, the main topics are set up to answer questions based on the nature of the generative sentence.

What rhetoricians call "content" also can be predicted. I can not go fully into the matter, but I invite you to test my hypothesis that attention to the natural dynamics of the generative sentence gives quick and conclusive insights into the type and amount of development required by the sentence. A classification, for instance, requires a definition or description of the class; it also requires illustration or examples to show that the specific fits into the class. A generalization requires a description or definition--and the definition may be clarified by comparison and contrast; details and illustration are necessary to show that the specific deserves the generalization. The development required by a generalization judgment and a statement of causal relationship are obvious enough--once the student perceives that almost inevitably such generative sentences place a burden of proof upon the writer.

Once the student understands the responsibility which he must assume when he utters a generative sentence, he can readily understand that there are other kinds of generative statements. The simplest is the purpose statement which indicates that the writer is going to des-

cribe a process; the structure will be chronological; the content will be a description of the steps. Equally as inevitable, are the stock issues described last year at the conference on composition and communication by Richard Braddock. Once a writer undertakes to defend an argumentative thesis like "The United States should adopt the essential features of the British Broadcasting System," he is saddled with at least a consideration of the stock issues (1) Is there a need for a change? (2) What plan do you suggest? (3) Would your plan correct the evils of the present system? (4) Is your plan feasible?

Almost every intellectual discipline has its own format for articles, and the format spells out the issues or required thesis. As Maurice Beebe has pointed out in Literary Symbolism, "the critical paper almost inevitably must contain the introduction with its proposal, survey of research, and boost; the demonstration; and the conclusion with its clincher, summary, and application."

Most scientific journals have prescribed formats for their contributors. Professor Mitchell Marcus calls these various structures "exo-skeletons." A student can learn much from analyzing how they originally derived from generative theses.

A student can understand also that under some circumstances even an observation can be generative. "Jim Ryun won the mile run" is definitive, but "Russia won the last Olympics" is generative.

Teaching macro-rhetoric, that is, organization and development, is usually difficult because it might seem that an entire theme is necessary for each lesson. I find that generative rhetoric is a short cut. I frequently phrase sentences and ask students to indicate the development and organization which very likely ought to follow them: (1) Her boyfriend is really flaky. (2) LSD can have devasting effects on its

users. (3) Religious institutions have historically been the enemy of science. (4) Toads cause warts. (5) Messalina is conventionally regarded as the worst of the Roman women. (6) Dear Father and Mother: I want to get married.

Although I have chosen to confine myself to the large problems of macro-rhetoric, I suspect that you will see that the concept of generative rhetoric has a beneficial effect on the smaller units of micro-rhetoric. A student learns to avoid the extravagant assertion which he cannot possibly prove and probably does not mean. He tends to cull out vague and general diction which generates toomuch obligation. He learns to control his sentence structure because an overly involved sentence tends to become a maze of generative sentences, containing in one bundle possibly a generalization, and a classification, and a judgment--all of which entail responsibility he must fulfill. He tends to avoid ambiguity and irrelevance because he has a greater feeling for what each sentence and word should accomplish. He develops a sense of paragraph because he perceives that a topic sentence is generative and the development is the fulfillment of its obligation.

In general, I have found that students react well to generative rhetoric. In the first place, after being exposed to the rules of grammar and style for twelve years, they are bored, and they turned with eagerness to a new approach. They are the New Breed; they rebel against prescriptive rules, especially when they turn immediately to their anthology and find them violated. They like the inductive approach that is possible with this techniqu̇e. When we work with our anthology and determine the thesis of an essay, I stop and say, "Okay, there it

is. Is it a classification, generalization, judgment, or statement of cause? What issues are inevitably raised? Which ones do you think the writer will discuss?" The students are encouraged to predict the content and the structure and then check their analysis. If they succeed in anticipating the structure and development, they read with a sense of identity. If they miss, they are encouraged to reassess their analysis.

A student soon will learn that the analysis of generative sentences is not completely mechanical, and all writing is not the same. He will need to decide how much evidence is needed to support an assertion, for, instance, that "Most of the students were bored." He would need less support if the sentence was "Some of the students were bored." He will need to analyze the state of mind, education, and mentality of his prospective audience. For instance, when Richard Kostelanatz wrote in The New York Times that "some of Marshall McLuhan's ideas are brilliant insights," he had to decide what his audience knew about McLuhan's ideas.

Having been sensitivized to generative ideas and their obligation of content and development, a / student will know what questions will be asked, but he will have to decide which issues are crucial, and which are likely to be conceded.

A student should learn that the obligation of a generative sentence, like the mythological Janus, looks two ways. When a person comments, "That girl deserves her shady reputation," in addition to the responsibility of providing supportive information, he has the responsibility of having gone through certain thought processes before he made the judgment. Aware of this responsibility, a student ignores Madison Avenue assertions like "X Whiskey is the best in the world."

No one could possibly do the research and testing which justifies such a statement. Sensitive to his own responsibility, a student is less likely to write "Schools are better in New England than in the Middle West."

I will not take space to demonstrate fully how a student can be shown just what steps in thinking are necessary for the types of generative sentence, but,--to mention just one--to make a judgment, a person must decide on some kind of criterion, and then he must subject his specific to the test. A teacher, having established communication with a student about how ideas are formed and justified, can question a sophomore assumption by asking the student what his criterion is, and how he tested his specific.

The double obligation that I am discussing has overtones of the "oughtness" described by Immanuel Kant in his "Categorical Imperative." Since I wish to make my students very aware of the source and obligation of all their ideas I therefore refer to the "rhetorical imperative." When a student utters a generative statement, he "ought" to have done the proper research and thinking; he "ought" to provide the predictable supportive structure and development.

The New Breed of student seems to react well to the concept of responsibility which the rhetorical imperative engenders. When a student reads a paper in class, his peers are likely to comment, "That assertion gives you more responsibility than you were willing to assume. You ought not to have said it." As a result, papers tend to increase in depth and texture.

The Rhetorical Imperative is thus the basis of a workable technique. The awareness of the intrinsic directives dynamics of expressions suggests to a student what he must do. It thus is a generative rhetoric.
-- Harry H. Crosby, Boston University.